

Interview H0000: with Setrong Wangye [tib. gser grong dbang rgyal], (China, May 1993) : Part No. 1 of 7

Setrong Wangye was a member of a rich shungyupa (government taxpayer serf) family [tib. gshung rgyugs pa]) in Tülung [tib. stod lung] district. His family had large land holdings with its own miser [tib. mi ser] or bound peasants/serfs and also held the position of Gyatso gembo [tib. rgya mtsho rgan po] for the district. In this interview he talks about his life in the old society, as well as about the People's Association, Alo Chöndze, and about his family's decision to implement "trial" land reforms on his land in 1956-57.

Q

At that time, there were two famous households in Kyomolung [tib. skyor mo lung] [in Tölung Dechen district]. It was said, "In the upper part of the valley there is Setrong Yumey and in the lower part there is Kyarpo Ayara [tib. ser grong g.yu smad/ skyar po a yar ba]. The son of Ayara became a dancer in the Dalai Lama's dance troupe [tib. gar phrug pa]. I don't know if he is still alive or not.

A

Probably, he is no more. Whatever questions regarding the society or the taxes you have, you can ask whatever questions and I will tell you whatever I can.

Q

In 1951, the 17-Point Agreement was signed, right? At that time where were you? I need to know the experiences of all kind of people not only the Kudrak or government officials/aristocrats.

A

At that time, I was in the countryside.

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Q

But you came to Lhasa frequently, right?

A

Not only did I come frequently, but when we came to Lhasa, we were regarded as Lhasa people and not as people from the countryside. We would go to play majong a lot.

Q

You were flashy, right? [Laughter]

A

Yes, I was a flashy. But I had to go back on time because my family were [shungyupa](#) (government taxpayer serfs) with the largest number of [tregang](#) or "fields from which taxes are due" [tib. khral rkang] in that district. We were [also] the Gyatso [gembo](#) [tib. brgya [tsho](#) rgan po] so we were in charge of the nine village headmen in that area. So whatever kind of edicts we received from the local government (the Tibetan government) about taxes, we would take care of them. Although the district [district heads] were there, since there wasn't any income from taxes, the district would say that the Gyatso [gembo](#) should deal with the taxes. In 1930, when the Iron=Tiger Year Land Enumeration Settlement [tib. lcags thag zhib gzhung] was made, many tax fields that had become extinct [the holders had died or fled] were merged into our household because our household was quite well-off. So my household became well-off and had many people working for us and we had a whole lot of tax fields.

At that time, that place was called Tölung Tshede Dzong [tib. stod lung tshal bde rdzong] and geographically the place was kind of elongated. Therefore the area was divided into three parts, an upper part called Tötso [tib. stod tsho], a middle part called Bartso [tib. bar tsho], and a lower part called Meytso [tib. smad tsho]. Since 1918, our household had become the permanent Gyatso [gembo](#) for the Tötso area, and we had documents that showed that we have been doing the Gyatso [gembo](#) work for many generations. At that time, we had to take the responsibility of the taxes in the Tötso area. My late brother did the Gyatso [gembo](#) work for many years, but when he was about 40 years old he told me, "I will take care of the fields at home and you should go outside and do the [Gyatso gembo] things." As a Gyatso [gembo](#), we had two horses, one servant, and a saddle [bag](#) with food

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prepared. So whenever orders came from the local (Tibetan) government or the district, we had to go to Lhasa or other places right away. We didn't have time to relax like other people. There were 9 Gyatso [gembo](#) in the area. From 1951-57 I stayed in the countryside and worked as the Gyatso [gembo](#).

The Tibetan Autonomous Region (PCTAR) was started in 1956 and it was said that we should establish its political authority in the local areas so "Experimental Administration Departments" [tib. tshod Ita'i don gcod khang, ch. ban [shi](#) qu] were established in some of the districts. I was given the responsibility to set up the Administration Department from the revolution's side [the Chinese side] because I was familiar with the local areas. On the other hand, I also had to be the Gyatso [gembo](#) working for the local (Tibetan) government's side. So it seemed to me that I was quite busy. Finally, after the County Administration Department was set up, many cadres came from the Civil Administration Department [ch. min zheng qu] and they established political authority [in the local area]. I was appointed as the Vice Director [ch. fu zhu ren] of the Tölung Administration Department. So I had two jobs at this time, the Gyatso [gembo](#) for the local (Tibetan) government and the Vice Director [for the PCTAR]. I was told that I was not allowed to do anything that violated the 17-Point Agreement. So that was the principle. I worked only for one year from August 1956 to 1957 in the County Administration Department because in 1957 Zhou Enlai went to India and announced from India, "Until the leaders and the masses of Tibet have a clear realization [wish for], land reforms will be postponed for six years." This department was an experimental office [whose purpose was] to make the land reforms.

Q

What work did you do in the office and what was the attitude of the masses at this time towards land reforms? Please tell me in detail. And what did you think about this in 1954-55?

A

When the Administration Department was set up by the Chinese Communist Party there were three people in my household: my older brother, me, and my younger brother. Although Tibet had been peacefully liberated in 1951, deep down we did not trust the Communist Government much. During the period from 1951-1956, I was like a person in

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between. I would go to Lhasa and drink sweet tea [Indian tea] and play majong. There were many people like us.

Q

Do you drink [Tibetan homemade] beer?

A

I don't drink beer, but I would go with them to the beer bars and drink sweet tea. At this time, there was an office called the jitsobu or the Society Department [tib. spyi tshogs ch. bu]) and someone from that office was searching for people like us and making friends with us.

Q

Was that office located in Surkhang's house?

A

It was the police.

Q

It was mainly for luring [tib. bkug] people.

A

Yes, you are right. They were doing intelligence work. They would make friends with all kinds of people regardless of wealth. There were great Communist Party members then. Those people made friends with us, though we didn't have the condition to make friends. They called us to the office and gave us tea and snacks.

Q

I also had gone like this.

A

People like Tashi Tsering and us were brought to their offices. One office was in Surkhang's house and one was in Sechung's [tib. gsar byung] house. They asked us what comments we had toward the local (Tibetan) government and what were the opinions

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of the masses. At that time, there were a lot of rumors saying that the communists were very bad. Some of the rumors were believable and some were not. One of the rumors which I believed said that if people had good wealth, they will confiscate it and divide it among the poor people. This was popular. So we didn't like this since we were quite rich. Another rumor was that no matter wherever it is, the Chinese Communist Party would kill all the old things whether it is a dog, horse, donkey, or ox. Normally, the cattle would be slaughtered for meat, but it was said that all animals would be killed when they got old. Not only that, even the human beings would be killed when they became old. [Laughter]. At that time, [Tsendrön](#) Gyentsen Phüntsoḡ La [tib. rgyal mtshan phun tshogs lags] and I had a discussion about that being a lie.

Q

You mean at that time, right?

A

Yes. We said that now the younger ones were the killers and later they also would become old, but they won't kill [old] people. That is a lie.

Q

I too didn't believe this at that time. But I too believed the others things being said, like saying they would impose big taxes and steal the things [of the rich] and divide them among the poor. At that time, the meaning of liberation was that. On one side, it was said that the people would be liberated politically and on the other side it was about the economy and it was said they would take away from the haves and divide it among the have nots.

A

In 1951 the 17-Point Agreement was signed. Before that, two of my brothers and I got a Tibetan translation of the "Common Programme" [tib. spyi mnyam rtsa tshig, ch. gong tong [gang](#) ling]. We three brothers closed the door and read this at night by candle light and discussed it a lot. We thought that the so called Communist Party probably was not that bad, but we didn't trust them. Because of this, when the Social Department set up the "Society School" [tib. spyi tshogs slob grwa] and insisted a little bit and told me to come and be a Tibetan teacher in that school, I said, "I am a rural man, so I can't do this at all."

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This was because I didn't believe in them from the bottom of my heart. Up to 1956 we three brothers discussed a lot about what would be better. At that time, in the 8.1. State Farm [ch. ba yi nong chang], there was a Brigade Leader [ch. da dui zhang] called Li and we became very friendly as we had done some business. He said to me in a very tactful [tib. mkhas po] way, "Could you do some financial work for the regiment like going hither and thither." He tried to lure me to join the revolution, but I said no way. I didn't want to do it at all.

Q

In 1952, the People's Association started and the people said that it was backed by the Sitsab. Do you know anything about that?

A

At that time I didn't join the revolution but I also made comments against the bad feudal system. I didn't believe in the revolution much but also didn't like the old society much because we weren't Kudrak (aristocrats/government officials) and we didn't have high status. At that time the masses made serious comments on the matter saying that the Kudraks didn't practice the law fairly. I not only had similar comments, but I was also very agitated about that. So I didn't join the revolution and I also didn't like the old [society]. At this time, the People's Association was started. I knew that Lobsang Trinley [tib. blo bzang 'phrin las] who was a Manager (tib. Chandzö) of [Sera Mey](#) College and the son of Tsarong's servant, was in the People's Association.

Q

Was he the Chandzö of Lhatsun [labrang](#) [tib. lha btsun bla brang]?

A

No, he wasn't. He was a Chandzö of the (monastic) College (tib. [tratsang](#)). I was friends with him from our youth because we had had a relationship through Tsarong. So he tried to get me to join the organization saying, "You know what kind of people should join the association? It is people like you who have relations with the masses and are familiar with the Kudrak and the social system and have some education in reading and writing." At that time, I knew just a little Tibetan, but it was regarded as quite high. He told me, "It would be very good if you joined the People's Association." Now all the excellent [tib. dpe 'dra

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po] people in the society are in the association. So when I asked who: he said, Chandzö Thamjölä [tib. dam chos] who is from Sera mey.

Q

Is that the one who had a wife?

A

Yes, and Bumthang Trunyi [tib.'bum thang drung yig] who was one of the famous Chandzö (managers) and Trunyi (secretries). And Shigatse Lhabju [tib. lhab phyug].

Q

He was from Emagang [tib. e ma sgang], right?

A

Yes. He would stay in Lhasa for long times filing law cases. I knew Lhabju from when I would make appeals to the Kashag almost regularly on tax matters. He was frequently there too. Then he said there was Trunyi Chögyen [tib. chos rgyan] who lived in Thebunggang [tib. thal phung sgang] in Lhasa. I asked him, "Do you have anybody providing financial support for you?" I asked him this because the above mentioned people didn't have [good] economic conditions. They were just capable and eloquent and knew Tibetan writing quite well and had rich experiences. Then he whispered to me, "The [Gyümey](#) [tib. rgyd smad pa] [monks] are supporting them financially." When I asked him what was their main duty, he told me all the above mentioned rumors saying the Chinese were very bad. The communists have such a bad system and he told me about the prophecy given by the 13th Dalai Lama about the Mongolia Dakhural (Ulan Bator).

Q

You mean about how communism flourished in Mongolia and that Tibet would become like this, right?

A

Yes, how Tibet would become like this. So in order not to become like this, we should expell all the Chinese.

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Q

This was the principle, right?

A

This was the political goal. We should gather some leaders and mobilize the masses and all the Tibetans should unite together and expel the Chinese. Then I told him, "Oh I see. This is really good." [Laughter].

That night I went home and when all the servants went to sleep, I lit a candle and discussed this with my two brothers. I told them that Lobsang Trinley had asked me to join their association and I told them that I planned to join it. My older brother said, "No way. Do not take notice of them. If you go there, later there will be all kinds of trouble from that. You know a little about the Communist Party." I knew a little about the Chinese Communist Party because earlier I had gone to Sadam in Yunnan to trade.

Q

Wasn't it a very long distance from here (Lhasa) to the border [in Yunnan]?

A

Now it is the place where the Naxi Nationality live. At that time, there was a county called Lijang County where there were Guomindang troops. They were so strong that when we compared them with the troops of the local (Tibetan) government, the latter appeared so small. There were so many soldiers and their weapons were very good and their discipline was so strict. When one got into the regiment, one couldn't get out and they didn't let people get in indiscriminately.

It happened to be at the time of a Guomindang festival and all the soldiers were out for marching, etc. They carried their weapons and their cannons, all of which were very good American cannons. At that time, the Chinese couldn't make cannons. Their rifles, Pamaling 79, that were carried by all the soldiers were German, but the bullets all were American; and they had plenty of bullets. I heard that the Germans didn't make the bullets. I bought some guns (called Pamaling 79) at that time. There was no comparison between the strength of Guomindang troops in Lijang County and all of the Tibetan army. It was like the difference between the sky and earth. The Chinese Communist Party had already destroyed the Guomindang, so I told my brothers many times that there is nobody within

the PRC that could handle the Chinese Communist Party. So my older brother said, "As you said, the Chinese Communist Party has driven the Guomindang to Taiwan. In 1948, they [Tibetan Government] expelled the Chinese [from Lhasa], but now it would not be so easy to expel the Chinese. So do not make relations with them." I felt like laughing in my mind when I thought about that [expelling the Chinese]. He also said he didn't think they could mobilize all the masses of Tibet since most of the masses were poor. If the Chinese Communist Party said that they would make their livelihood good, they wouldn't choose to remain under this exploitation and suppression [of the traditional system]. Therefore, they would not be able to mobilize the masses. So we discussed this and my brother told me not to make any relations with people like Lobsang Trinley. So we decided on this.

At this time, they [People's Association] had invited Se Shiga [tib. zas gzhis ka][Tsewang Namgyal] to the meeting. I was friendly with Se Shiga. I met him and he said, "Joining the People's Association is good. Aren't you going to join it?" I just said yes. He joined the Association and he attended the meeting.

Q

Probably, the meeting was held in Jarag [tib. sbyar rag]?

A

No. It was probably held in the lower part of [Tsidrung Linga](#) [tib. rtse drung gling ga] that was called Nyertsang Linga [tib. gnyer tshang gling ga]. [He said] they made a document. In this document there were 6 points and they probably needed to get the document signed. It was said to say mainly that we must expel the Chinese although I didn't see it. When they read the document, Se Shiga said, "This will not do and that will also not do." He didn't accept a few points. He was kind of standing on the revolution side and he also hated the old society, but he couldn't give it up. He also hated the Chinese. He was someone in between. Right after that, the other people in the meeting were strong [tib. hrag po] and they discussed this and said, "What Mister Se Shiga said is right. So from now on, let's not hold the meeting and let's burn the document." And they tore the document and burned it. On that day, the meeting scattered. However, they still had the draft of the document and they [did it just because they] wanted to drive out Se Shiga.

Q

They thought that Se Shiga didn't agree with this, right?

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A

That's why they wanted to drive him out. But they couldn't tell him not to come.

Q

Se Shiga was the owner of an estate, but he was not a Kudrak. However, he was the author of the Tibetan spelling book called Dagyig Ma nor Lamsang [tib. dag yig ma nor lam bzang].

Q

Did the other meeting members think that Se Shiga was pro-Chinese?

A

Yes. They thought that. He had first been a teacher at the [Society School](#) and then he was a middle school teacher. So they thought he was pro-revolution and they wanted to drive him out, but they thought they should not drive him out in an ugly manner. But Se Shiga believed this and he told me that now the People's Association was scattered. However, actually it was not scattered and the People's Association continued surreptitiously without calling him.

Later, at the time of Mönlam [Prayer Festival], they made as much offerings and alms as they could and they also burned incense according to Tibetan custom. Then they actually tried to put into action expelling the Chinese and they tried to find some support, but they couldn't find much. The leaders like Thamjö Sonam, Bumthang Trunyi, and Trunyi Chögyen all had good relations with Kudrak and they were like the teachers of the Kudrak so internally they would ask them about writing things. So at first they surreptitiously got close to the 2 Sitsab. [Lukhangwa](#) was especially conservative. At that time, he could only see the local (Tibetan) government and couldn't see anything else. He would never listen to the foreign news and information. When people told him about foreign customs, he would say, "Our customs and foreign customs are not same." He was very tough or hardheaded, but they reported to him surreptitiously. If the Sitsab hadn't given the permission and the People's Association had tried to do that, the 2 Sitsab would have eliminated them right away. So, regarding the question, "Did the Sitsab support them?" Yes, the Sitsab supported them because the 2 Sitsab agreed to keep the old customs and oppose the new. Therefore, the two of them agreed to do that right away. Furthermore,

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[Lukhangwa](#) was the guardian (tib. [tsondzin](#) ['tsho 'dzin]) of [Gyümey](#) College, so whatever economic work the college did, they consulted him first. I knew this very clearly.

Q

Was he their financial supporter, like their patron (tib. [jindag](#) [sbyin bdag])?

A

No. The term Jindag is used for those who give alms and [mangja](#) (tea at the monk's communal prayer sessions). This was different. They were like advisors on all the political and financial affairs. So [Gyümey](#) College was complying with whatever [Lukhangwa](#) said, and by the grace of [Lukhangwa](#), [Gyümey](#) experienced great development. They could build new houses on their 18 estates. They accomplished this under the guidance of [Lukhangwa](#), so [Gyümey](#) had whole-hearted respect for [Lukhangwa](#). Therefore, one day he told [Gyümey](#), "The communists are the ones who will eliminate religion. So we, the Gyüto and [Gyümey](#), are the main essence of religion, so if you, [Gyümey](#), can help the People's Association a little bit financially, that will be good." I just heard that, though I was not there. But this wasn't empty talk and they gave the People's Association the money equivalent of 2,000 [khe](#) of barley. This was top secret. If they gave grain, people would have known because there were many peasants (tib. [miser](#)) working on that. So they gave money.

Q

We have never heard this before.

Q

How did you learn that? You must have heard this internally.

A

I heard this from the people who were in the People's Association like Chandzö Lobsang Trinley and Thamjö Sonam, although I was not so close to Thamjö Sonam. But one day I was standing in front of my house located opposite of [Gyambumgang](#) Khensur [tib. rje 'bum sgang mkhan zur].

Q

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Was that Taglungjang [tib. stag lung byang]?

A

It was the small house adjacent to Taglungjang. I was giving my horse fodder near the gate when Lobsang Trinley came by and said, "Oh! Meeting you today is excellent." I asked him where did you go? He said, "I went to Tshipön [Namseling](#)." [Namseling](#) was one of the main supporters of the People's Association. I asked him, "What did you go for?" Then he pulled out a document from his pouch and said, "I went to show this to [Namseling](#)." Actually, he was supposed to show the document to me and I should have called him in, but I also knew that and I just said, "Oh I see," and told him some jokes. Then he said, "Aren't you going to come into our organization?" I said, "I'm a villager who doesn't know anything. If I joined your group, it would be disgraceful for you people, so my coming would be useless." I didn't invite him in, and I also didn't tell him that I was not going to join the association.

Q

You acted in a tactful way because you didn't want to join it from the bottom of your heart, right?

A

Yes. After we talked a lot I still didn't invite him in so he left on his way. My late older brother probably saw us talking from the upper window and he may have felt very anxious so he asked me what were you talking about. I jokingly said he asked me to join the association and I had no choice but to say I would. My brother got all upset and said, "This is absolutely impossible [tib. dpe srid dwogs med]. No way! You should not take notice of those people." Then I said that I was just kidding.

Then the [Communist] Party talked with the Kashag and the two Sitsab were put aside [from active duty].

Q

That was in April in 1952, right?

A

Yes, the leaders of the People's Association went to protest.

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Q

Didn't they submit a petition to the Kashag?

A

They gave the petition to the Kashag and they also got together with the Kashag and submitted the petition to the [Tibet] Work Committee [ch. gong wei].

Q

There was Zhang Jingwu and those people there, right? Was Zhang Guohua there?

A

Yes. He was there and there was the one who came from Qinghai [Fan Ming]. At that time, people used to say that the soldiers who were wearing the whitish uniforms were Zhang Jingwu's soldiers and the other ones were from Qinghai.

Q

That was Fan Ming.

A

Yes, you are right. They shouted protests against those people.

Q

Did they submit the petition through the Kashag or did they submit it directly [to the Work Committee]?

A

They consulted with the Kashag carefully and probably, although I didn't know for sure, they might have submitted it through the Kashag. Otherwise, they wouldn't have found the way to go there, right? At that time, the Kashag had to abide by whatever the Sitsab said. Since they [People's Association] had links with the Sitsab, there would be problems for the Kashag and also the [Yigtsang](#). I just heard that they shouted, though I didn't join this and didn't see it clearly and don't know whether they had submitted the petition through the Kashag or not.

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Q

What I heard was that [Lukhangwa](#) told them [People's Association] that they should gain the support of the masses before they report. Was that true? Or had the leaders of the People's Association thought from the beginning and reported it to the Sitsab and also tried to gain the support of the masses? Or did they report to the Sitsab and the Sitsab told them that they should gain the masses support? So which came the first?

A

What first happened was that they [People's Association] discussed and said that if we couldn't fix up the Sitsab, we would not be able to accomplish our work.

Q

Did the Sitsab tell them, "From one side, get the approval from us, but you should also try to gain support from the masses?" Or did they already have this idea?

A

They also had the idea and the two Sitsab also knew it. Since they gave it the name Tibetan people, it wouldn't do if you didn't have the masses. This is what we knew, right? Therefore, the Sitsab also probably thought that they should mobilize the masses. They definitely had that thought. As for the leaders of the People's Association, usually in the society, if possible people would act very tactful towards them. For example, Thamjō Sonam was from a wealthy monk's household in [Sera Mey](#) College, but then he lost his celibacy and didn't get along well with them. He was neither a local government official nor was he in good economic condition. He couldn't trade well and he didn't have any agricultural fields. His home and relatives were in Tölung Dechen, and they also didn't have anything. But he was very capable and all the Kudrak called him "teacher" when he came to their homes. So they [the leaders of the People's Association] might have discussed this surreptitiously. So from one side, if they didn't mobilize the masses, it won't be compatible with the name "people". From the other side, if they couldn't get support from the two Sitsab, and if the Sitsab didn't let them be successful, it would be impossible for them to set up the association. They had this thought and the Sitsab also told them that it would be excellent if you could mobilize the masses and set up the People's Association. For example, when the revolution offices [the Chinese] wanted to build some house in the

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Lubug area like the spaces where the [Chinese] Military Headquarters [ch. jun qu] was located, when they asked the Sitsab to give them that space to use, I heard that they said that that is not okay. However, some of the patriotic people like us told them [the Chinese], "It doesn't matter. Go ahead and build the house and then ask for the space. They will not come to destroy it. This will be the best." So the Sitsab didn't have that kind of power.

Q

Are Phala and [Namseling](#) brothers from the same parents?

A

I didn't hear that they were brothers from the same parents, but probably they were relatives. The Kudrak had a lot relatives and called them older brothers and younger brothers [actually older and younger male relative of the same generation].

Q

When was it that Lobsang Trinley met you outside your house? Was that before the Mönlam?

A

That was almost at the time of the famous Mönlam. I remember it was in 1953.

Q

Probably it was in January in 1952 when the Sitsab were demoted.

Q

Did you hear about the posters on which it was written that they have an Association and will not submit the petition during the Mönlam but rather were going to submit it between the Mönlam and the Tsonjö [Prayer Festivals]. Do you remember this?

A

No.

Q

Have you heard of Lhatsun Labrang Chandzö? Was he in the People's Association?

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A

No. I heard that he went abroad.

Q

Do you know his name?

A

He was the Chandzö (manager) of Lhatsun Lama.

Q

Do you know whether he was in the Association?

A

I don't know.

Q

I heard that the People's Association did a lot of things, like surrounding Zhang Jingwu's house. One night there was a danger that war/fighting would break out.

Q

At that time, they had built bunkers on the [Trimön](#) house [which had become a main Chinese office], right?

A

That's right.

Q

At one time, the Chinese military officers were afraid so they kept [Kalöns] Ngabö and Surkhang in their building [Trimön house] for the whole night. Did you remember about this?

A

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I didn't join in this, so I didn't see it. I just heard that they went to throw something at the [Sandutsang](#) house which is located near Trimön's house and it seemed that there was an office in there. This was the time when something really kind of exploded. I heard there were arrests, and the Sitsab were demoted, but this was just heard [by me] not seen. But they didn't treat them badly and left them in the police station and Alo Chöndze was also there [Note: He is now confusing this with the Second People's Association which was prominent in 1955-56]. At this time, the Chinese Communist Party was very cautious about the People's Association. When a small thing happened, they used to be very cautious. Actually, the People's Association didn't have any real strength since they had no troops other than the weapons that they privately owned. They didn't have [weapons] from the local (Tibetan) government. What they had was some eloquent people. But the Chinese felt that they posed a serious danger because they were basing this on their experiences in Qinghai. However, we, the ordinary people, knew that the People's Association couldn't do anything and we laughed at the Chinese doubts. But we also didn't have much faith in the revolution, so up to 1956 we weren't able to join the revolution.

Q

Was Kamekhang [tib. dkar me khang] Chöndze in the first People's Association?

A

I knew him a little bit. I didn't regard him as a capable person in the Association.

Q

Wasn't Alo Chöndze and Lhabju in the Second People's Association? And weren't they shut up in the police station? Wasn't that in 1954? This was the second one, although they might have some relations, but the leaders were different.

A

Yes, probably, this was in 1954-55. [Note: actually 1956]

Q

And Pisur was also one of the main ones at that time, right?

A

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Not really one of the main ones. Pisur was not there. I often saw Alo Chöndze and Lobsang Trinley coming out of the [Tromsigang](#) [tib. khrom gzigs khang] [police station where Alo Chöndze was being detained]. Lobsang Trinley was detained also [Note: actually it was Bumthang Trunyi who was the third detainee]. I don't think that there was a first and second [People's Association]. It was really kind of continuous between the first and the second. And like the first, the latter one didn't have that much effect because the Sitsab had been demoted, their main supporter was no more and consequently Namseling's reputation also kind of decreased.

Q

But he was still a Tsipön, right?

A

Yes. Probably, he helped the association secretly. Since Lobsang Trinley went to ask [Namseling](#), this definitely shows that he was leading them. But outwardly there wasn't any talk that [Namseling](#) did anything. As for the detainees, nobody was kind of handling them later since the revolution law [Chinese laws] did not deal with them because they hadn't got power [the Chinese]. The Tibetan government imprisoned them because the Work Committee insisted. They were released when the three great monasteries vouched for them.

Q

Probably, this was in 1956.

Q

At the end of that year, Alo Chöndze went to India.

Q

Yes. He went through Lhoka. This was the second Association. Then the People's Association was scattered (disbanded).

A

I heard that at that time, Alo Chöndze had a kind of new policy which gave relief/aid to the beggars.

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Q

Yes. He also built a house for the beggars.

Q

What was their new policy?

A

It was to lead the poor.

Q

This was to lure the poor people. They built the beggars house near Tengyeling [tib. bstan tgyas gling].

A

Yes, they gathered all the beggars and told them that they were going to give them quite a lot for their livelihood. At that time, we had a talk about this at home saying, "They are just talking rubbish. If they would gather all the beggars from all over Tibet they would not be able to feed them." [Laughter]. This is because he didn't have any capital. He thought that this would bring all the really poor people to his side. Alo Chöndze at first wasn't someone with big capital. He was the son of Ama Alo who lived in Karma Sharjen [tib. skar ma shar chen]. His sister, who was pockmarked, is still there. She used to sell some cigarettes by the piece. He was from the monk household of Tendar La [tib. bstan dar lags], who was the chief caretaker of the [Jokhang](#) Temple [in Lhasa], the könyepön [tib. dkon gnyer dpon]), who was from Drepung's [Loseling](#) College. This Könyepön did trading and was very rich. Alo Chöndze had borrowed a lot of money from the three great monasteries for building his house called Songra [tib. zog ra], so that is why the three great monasteries vouched for him. Alo was his mother's name and he became the Chöndze of Tendar La who was from Tölung Tinganub. Tendar La got the Könyepön job by protecting [Taktra](#) at the time when [the Regent] [Taktra](#) was about to have a misfortune. He was a [dobdo](#) then and sat on the roof of Taktra's house with a mauser pistol saying that he would kill anyone who came in. He became a favorite of [Taktra](#). So this was how he got the Könyepön job which was a source of great income. I was about the same age as Alo Chöndze. After this, Alo Chöndze became [Dombor](#) Trunyichemmo's servant. When

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I returned from Sadam [in Yunnan] Alo Chöndze was going down to Sadam with 20-30 mules and horses.

Q

At this time, he must have been Dombor's trader, right?

A

At this time, he was mainly Dombor's trader, but he also was doing a little bit of his own trading, and he was brought by another trader abroad. I heard that Alo had great luck in trading. Most people who went to Sadam took yellowish and blue cloth and cotton thread and brought back tea. He carried this kind of cigarette paper. He was only in his early 20's then. In Sadam, some smaller capitalists were making cigarettes by hand using this paper and at this time, they probably didn't have paper. Alo brought several loads of cigarette paper and he got a great price. No one thought of bringing paper until him. So he made a big profit.

Q

From where did he get the paper?

A

He got it from India. He got his capital from Drepung since he was a disciple of the Könyepön and had become a trader for [Dombor](#). He also brought back round tea bricks from Sadam.

Q

You said that the three great monasteries vouched for Alo Chöndze because he had borrowed a lot of money from the monasteries, right?

A

Yes, normally in the monasteries there is a saying, "The root should be handed over and [donggo](#) should be supplied with the leaves." [tib. rtsa ba rtsis sprod/ lo ma'i gtong sgo]. This means the monastery should lend the money to some traders for usually 20% interest and some a little smaller than this, and they would use the interest [from these loans] for supplying the [donggo](#) in the monastery. At that time, since Alo Chöndze was kind of a

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smart trader, the monasteries might have lent him money to get the interest. He built the Songra house and rented the shops and the rooms [on the first floor] and he also took a very high gift when people asked to rent these [tib. zhu rten]. He seemed like a big trader, but actually he was making the turnover with the money of the three great monasteries.

Q

Later, the three great monasteries didn't get their money, right?

A

They just got dry shit. [Laughter]. He didn't get the rent from the Songra House and he ran away abroad, and what he sold went to the three great monasteries. Songra later became a (Tibetan) government house.

Q

It was confiscated, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Later, he also built a house in Pelai Tshonkhor [tib. dpal lha'i mtsho 'khor], right?

A

Yes.

Q

Now can you tell us about the experimental land reform office called the Administration Department in the county (district) where you got involved? What was their detailed plan? Secondly, what was the viewpoint of the masses towards this office? Were the masses afraid of it or not? Did they welcome it or not? And there were many levels among the masses like the rich, the middle and poor, but what was the general opinion of the masses? And what was your detailed work in that place? At that time, you had joined the revolution [the Chinese communists], right?

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A

Yes. [Tsendrön](#) Gyentsen Phüntsog, who I knew from when I was young, was a very close friend and we were also majong partners. At that time, he was the head of Tshelde Dzong for the local (Tibetan) government. He had just switched from being a monk official to a lay official, and wore the sogche or Mongolian style dress [tib. sog chas]. On the other side [the Chinese side], he was probably the head [ch. [qu](#) zhang] of the Liaison Office [ch. lian luo qu] in the United Front Department [ch. tong zhan bu]. At that time, his status in the local government was just an ordinary lay official. The first year that shungdzin [tib. gzhung 'dzin] started [Note" this was a reform where district's income was managed directly by the government) was in 1954.

At that time, he was doing some ideological work toward me saying, "It is approved to set up the Experimental Administration Department, so we will set up one in your place [district], what are you going to do in detail?" At that time, I was quite clear about the social situation and when I asked him how we should set up the Administration Department, he said, "We need to set up an Experimental Administration Department for the preparation of the land reform [tib. sa zhing bcos sgyur gyi tshod lta'i don gcod khang]. So I need people like you in it who know everything." At that time, there was no class or [trerim](#) issues. He meant [he needed] people who were smart and who the people in the areas trusted. At that time, all the taxpayers in that area were very friendly with me and my late father and brothers.

Q

You were highly respected and famous, right?

A

Yes. They respected us highly. In this area, we used to give the poor people financial support when they requested it. So regarding the establishment of the County Administration Department, Gyentsen Phüntsog reported to the Work Committee and it was approved. This was to be set up by the Civil Administration Department [ch. min zheng qu] of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. The head of this office was Wangdü La [tib. dbang 'dus lags] who was from [Tashilhunpo](#). He knew Chinese and had stayed in China for a long time. He came in person to our area and called a meeting of the masses and explained about this. What I told them was that in

our area there were misers (peasants) belonging to aristocrats, the government and the monasteries [tib. gzhung sger mchod gsum]. Among these three, the [shungyupa](#) miser (government taxpayer serfs) like us didn't have much of a problem. However, regarding the monastic estates, the [chöshi](#) [tib. mchod gzhis], there were some that belonged to [Gyümey](#) College. and these were completely opposed to the revolution and they were the ones who supported the People's Association. At the same time, Kündeling Dzasa Wöser Gyentsen looked like he liked the revolution, but actually he was one of the people opposing the revolution. There were not many aristocrats [who liked the revolution]. There was the Gyangdrong [tib. gyang grong] Estate that belonged to Möndrong [tib. smon grong] and also Changöpa [tib. bya dngos pa]. And there was the Seshing [tib. zas zhim] estate of which the lay official became extinct [died] and the local (Tibetan) government gave the estate to the [Yabshi](#) family [of the 14th Dalai Lama]. Its estate manager was an [Amdo](#) person called Namse Phüntsoḡ [tib. nram sras phun tshogs]. He was a complete reactionary. [Laughter].

At that time, there was a speech given by the Dalai lama saying, "Sooner or later all people have to go on the socialist path [tib. mi tshang ma snga phyi ma gtogs spyi tshogs ring lugs kyi lam kha la 'gro dgos red]." We were adhering to this statement of the Dalai Lama. But Namse Phüntsoḡ said, "The Dalai Lama had no choice but to say that outwardly. However, internally, the Dalai Lama does not agree to this idea of land reform at all." Some people were saying that we should trust him because he was related to the Dalai Lama. Some people had a great belief in him. But the majority of the poor masses were agreeing with the Communist Party and we were also making some policies talking about what the Dalai Lama said above. Since we were a well-off household who was usually trusted by the masses, many people believed in us and said, "As the Dalai Lama said, the only way to go is the revolutionary path and the socialist path." Like this, the situation was kind of chaotic.

So we said that there would not be any harm if you set up the Experimental Administration Department. When we gathered people, Kündeling sent 1-2 people, but no one came from the other estates and the [Gyümey](#) also didn't come.

Q

You mean to this group?

A

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I mean they didn't come to become cadres of the office with the rank of a section leader [ch. [ke](#) zhang]. They didn't come, but we still could set up the Administration Department and we made a strong revolutionary policy. At this time, we were discussing at home [the brothers] whether we should stay in Tibet or flee to India. If we went to India, there we had grain, money, horses, mules, guns and servants. In 1956, if we had said we were going for trading, no one would know. My older brother had great respect for religion so he said, "If we go to India we would be alright in terms of economics because the kids would get some education and we could do trading because we have a little bit of capital and we would be alright with respect to our livelihood. However, in the future our kids would grow up in India and wouldn't have any faith in religion, so this was not good." So up to 1956 we were like this, not completely decided and we didn't join the revolution because we had doubt deep inside our minds. In 1956, this office was started and we decided that if the Chinese asked us to work for it, we, both of the brothers, would work, but we wouldn't ask them for it like people did for positions in the local (Tibetan) government. If they didn't offer the work, then we would leave it.

At this time, they set up a Branch Office of the [Tibet] Work Committee in the Lhasa Municipality [ch. [shi](#) fen gong wei]. Its Secretary was a Chinese man called Jia Shuji [ch. jia shu ji]. He came to our area and stayed a day or two during which time he did a thorough investigation. One day, he called Gyentsen Phüntso, me and my older brother, and we heard that he was the secretary of the Branch Work Committee and he was the man in charge. He said, "In this area, we are setting up the Administration Department and as for the main person who has to take the main responsibility, the two of you are the people who have the revolutionary capability and you were also born and grew up here and have been working here and you also believe in the revolution. So you two have to take the main responsibilities for this office." Then when we discussed this at home we said, "He is believing in us very much, so there isn't anything to say. We just have to work." Like this, we made the decision. My younger brother was a Sera monk, so he asked for leave from the monastic order saying that he had lost his celibacy. He was then enrolled in the [Society School](#). So the result was that the office was opened and Gyentsen Phüntso was the Senior Director [ch. zhu ren tib. rgen pa] and I and an ex-People's Liberation Army soldier called Liu, were the Vice Directors [ch. zhu ren gzhon pa]. My older brother was the Section Leader [ch. [ke](#) zhang] of the Judicial Section [ch. si fa [ke](#), tib. khirms 'dzin ch. ke]. They said this section was an important section. There

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were eight sections like the Culture and Education Section [ch. wen jiao ke] and the Civil Administration Section [ch. min zheng ke] [answer not finished].

Q

There was a full set of sections, right?

A

Yes, at that time the Section Leaders were appointed but [answer not finished].

Q

You couldn't get people right away at that time, right?

A

Yes, we couldn't get people. So I suggested that it would be better [at first] to set up sections where we could recruit people, and then gradually develop the others. This was approved. So we were able to set up five sections out of eight sections.

Q

After taking this job, you might have gotten a salary, right?

A

From August 1956, Wangdü La from the Civil Administration Department and the secretary of the Branch Work Committee came and they took great care of us.

Q

This was in 1956, right?

A

Yes.

Q

At that time, you had three brothers and your household was also very rich and you had land and probably had herds of animals in the upper part of the valley, right?

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A

Yes, we did.